

*The Jewish Philosophers encounter'd and confuted.*

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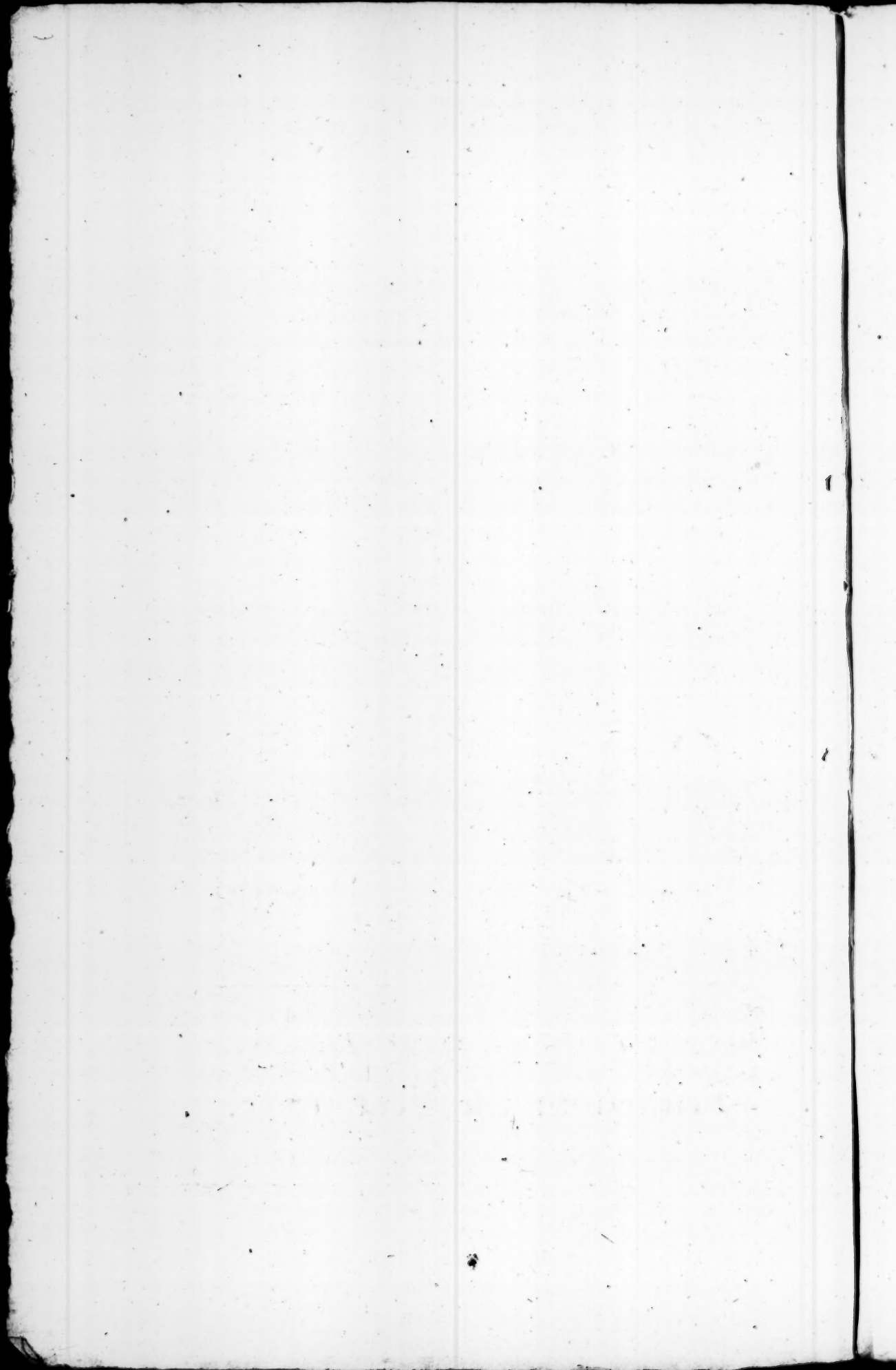
IN A  
SERMON  
Preach'd before the  
UNIVERSITY  
OF  
OXFORD,

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By a Late MEMBER of the  
Said UNIVERSITY.

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OXFORD,  
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S E R M O N

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I COR. I. 20.

*Where is the wife? where is the Scribe?  
where is the difputer of this world?  
Hath not God made foolifh the wif-  
dom of this world?*

**I**F the Excellence and Worth of Goodnefs  
is to be eftimated from the Largenefs of  
its Extent, never certainly was any of  
greater Value, than our Lords; the com-  
munication of it being extended to the whole  
Race of Mankind.

Indeed the firft Inftances of it, feem'd to be  
confin'd to the loft Sheep of the Houfe of *If-  
rael*, whom He came chiefly to Instruct in the  
Ways of Happinefs; and to guide their Steps,  
that they might not err in the Purfuit of it:

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all His Labours and Travels were to reconcile them to Himself, to establish 'em on those Foundations, which were not to be shaken, ev'n the sure Promises, that were made to *Abraham*, and fulfill'd in Himself, and to this purpose He taught 'em the full Import of their Law, by redeeming it from the weak Glosses of their Rabbies, and giving it the full *Latitude*, that *God* and *Moses* design'd it should have in the Government of their Thoughts and Actions.

He explain'd its Precepts by his unerring Comments, made those Rules of Vertue, more clear to their Understanding, fill'd 'em with Light to discover distinctly their Duty, and with Grace to enable 'em in the Performance of it. Yet such was the Strength of inveterate Prejudice (which brings as it were Night and Darkness upon the brightest Demonstrations) as to render his Endeavours ineffectual, to defeat the Pow'r of his Goodness and Charity, and to stop their Ears against the Charms of this mighty Charmer: his Addreses were all in vain; *Moses* had already so prepossessed their Hearts, that no Room cou'd be found for the Entertainment of this long expected *Messiah*; the Gospel must veil to the Law; the new Institution to the old *Oeconomy*; *the Servant must be preferr'd before the Son*.

But yet he left them not tho' they rejected him; He still renew'd his Applications, and made their Scorns fresh Arguments of Address; He wou'd make them happy against their Will,  
and



and extort that by Importunity, which he cou'd not gain on easier Terms. But the *Jew* was as resolv'd and stubborn, as God was kind and earnest for his good. Nor was the wise and Disputer of the World less obstinate against the Apostles, than was the Scribe against their Master: these Sages could not endure to have their Wisdom accounted Foolishness, which they had purchas'd at the Expence of Health and Fortune; they travell'd the World, underwent the Dangers, both of Sea and Land, *fled to all the Marts and Factories of Science, in what distant Parts soever seated*, and spent their Lives in this mutual Commerce and Exchange of Notions; and cou'd not think of bringing their Books of Wisdom as the Magicians did theirs, and laying 'em at the Apostles Feet, in order only to be burnt, as useless. They valued at a higher Rate that Knowledge, that cost 'em so much Pains and Treasure to acquire. These Philosophers therefore stood upon their Punctilio's with the Messengers of Heaven, and wou'd not admit, what was disagreeable to those *Ideas*, and that Sense of Things, that had got the prepossession, of their Minds. Their Honour now engag'd them to maintain, what they had learned from their Ancestors, and not surrender to the novel Institution of unknown Teachers; and tamely submit the Acquisitions of their Reason to a cheap, inglorious Faith: for this was laid to the Apostles Charge, that they only requir'd a strong Faith from their Disciples.

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This was an Humility, they cou'd not bear, thus to be levell'd with the Vulgar, to be spoil'd of that Distinction, that Nature and Industry had given them above the Many.

To believe (they thought) was a *compendious* Way to Knowledge, but fit only for the Weakness and Imperfections of the People *not for the exalted Genius, that loves to cope with Theories, that are set out of the reach of common Abilities and Attainments.* These Philisophers therefore, were for such Doctrines, that wou'd exercise, not their Faith, but Reason: neither wou'd they yield their Assent to any thing offer'd to that that came not with Demonstration, or at least the highest Probability.

But the Apostle not withstanding the great Discouragements he met with, from these Wits and Disputers of the World, goes in the Discharge of his Office, and at last, gains Success (as he needs must, having Almighty Power to abet his Labour) over all the Contradiction of his Adversaries as we gather from this holy Triumph in the Words of the Text, *where is the wise? &c.* in the 17. Verse of this Chapter the Apostle professes, he was sent not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel; and that not with the Wisdom of Words, lest the Cross of Christ, shou'd be made of none Effect, but by doing and suffering (shou'd Necessity require) in an humble Imitation of his Lord that sent him.

Nor was he any Way deficient in the Execution of his Charge; for tho' his Embassy  
and

and Person were receiv'd with Scorn for Proclaiming a crucified Saviour, and exacting from his Disciples Faith in and Obedience to him; tho' he was ridicul'd for publishing, and they for believing; yet he bore up against all the Malice of Contempt and Reflection; and was not afraid to encounter their Infidelity with this seasonable Assertion; that what ever his Gospel might be to them that perish, yet to the humble and repenting Convert, 'twas the Wisdom of God, and the Pow'r of God.

We see the Purpose of St. *Pauls* Mission, and the Instructions, with which he was furnish'd by the Ministry of Inspiration, to deliver to the Gentile World, the entire Mystery of Godliness, and in particular this noble Article and Branch of it, the Redemption of Mankind by a crucified Saviour; even by Jesus Christ; a Person altogether wonderful, in the Bosom of his Father, and Womb of his Virgin-Mother; the Burthen of the Prophetick, and the Joy and Glory of the Evangelick Writings.

And now the great incarnate Angel of the Covenant; fore-ordain'd from all Eternity to this high and beneficial Office, of Attoneing for Sin, and recommending fall'n Man, to the Grace and Favour of an offended God! and as God in the Fullness of Time, sent this his Son to save the World by Preaching, living, and dying for it: so he likewise commission'd his Evangelists and Apostles to publish this same Doctrine of Salvation, to enlighten the Understanding,

derstanding, to regulate the Will and Passions, and to refine the Morals of Mankind, and thereby prepare 'em in some Measure to receive the Benefit of his meretorious Sufferings on Earth.

Amongst them, our Apostle had no small share of the Employment, he immediately obey'd the heavenly Call, and leaving the Jewish Synagogue with all its Ceremonies, brought with him into the Christian Church his great learning and noble Zeal, with which indeed he once persecuted those, that call'd upon the Name of Jesus; but now employs both in the Support of them, in their Profession, and the Propagation of this new Religion; a Religion in all its Parts compleat, that did outdo whatever Nature and *Moses* taught, and before which all other Religions fell, as *Dagon* did before the Ark.

The Words thus prefac'd may lead us into the Consideration;

1<sup>st</sup>. Of the great Opposition Christianity met with, at the first Promulgation of it both from Jew and Gentile.

2<sup>ly</sup>. Of the Method of Argumentation the Apostles us'd in Confutation of, and gaining a Victory over both.

3<sup>ly</sup>. I shall draw some Inferences from the Premises, and so conclude; and of each Briefly. And

I. Of the Opposition that Christianity met with at its first Promulgation both from Jew and Gentile; and that chiefly arose from the  
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Opinion they had of the sufficiency of their own Religion for all Ends and Purposes *either of this, or of another Life*, upon which Score they were unwilling to admit any other, either to rattle, disturb it, or attempt to overthrow it; and therefore to prevent any further Mischief from this growing Evil, they thought it expedient, to use all their Endeavours to suppress it in its nonage, before it arriv'd to maturity, and had gather'd strength, by gaining the Hearts and Affections of the People. And to this Purpose all Engines were set on Work to undermine it, First, by Reproaches, and Lyes, and Calumnies, that *common and wretched Artifice of Blasting the Credit of Things or Persons*; and when these choice Arguments fail'd 'em, the Purity of its Precept, and holy Lives of its Professors, still Supporting its Reputation against all the Batteries of Spite and Malice; they thought it not inconvenient in the next Place to call into their Assistance the arm of civil and sacred Authority, to suppress that by downright Power, which they cou'd not by reason, and Argumentation.

The *Jews* implor'd Aid from the *Sanhedrims*, and the *Pagans* from their Princes and Nobles to extirpate and banish this Mushroom upstart Heresy (as they were pleas'd to call it) out of the World. And as more particularly the *Jews* oppos'd the Doctrine of a crucified Saviour because 'twas first quite contrary to those Sentiments they generally entertain'd of their *Messiah*. For they expected that he shou'd come attend-



ed with all the Glory and Power of a Monarch; that he shou'd be able to rescue 'em from the Pride and Insults of the Roman Armies; their Minds were possess'd with thoughts of Triumph and Revenge; that under his Conduct they shou'd tread upon the Necks of all their Enemies, and make their Conquerours their Captives; that they shou'd change their Slavery for everlasting Freedom, *their Rags and Cottages for Purple and the Seats of the Nobles*; and finally fill their Coffers with the Spoils and Treasures of their Neighbours; in all which they erred, not rightly understanding their own Scriptures: as did also the Apostles themselves, in the Quality of the *Messiah's* Kingdom, for had he been such as their Wilhes wou'd have made him, he had not been the *Messiah* foretold by the Prophets. Secondly, another Objection the *Jews* had against their Admission of Christianity, was the mistaken Opinion they conceiv'd of the perpetual Obligation of the Mosaick Law, and that that Form of Worship with all its Rites and Ceremonies, was to continue in its full Force to all coming Generations; neither of which was ever intended by the Author of it; for that was but a temporary Institution peculiarly fram'd for that People, and to cease, when that People ceas'd to be a Nation: neither had those Rites any intrinsick Goodness of their own; but deriv'd their Worth from the Authority, and subsisted upon the Will and Pleasure of the Legislator. And therefore upon Occasion were often dispenc'd with, as that of the Circumcision

cision during the *Israelites* Travel in the Wilderness; and all were to expire by the wise decree of God, at such a Period of Duration, to make Room for a nobler State of Affairs, inconsistent with the being of this. And had we not Prophecies in the Old Testament to warrant this Opinion, we might fairly gather it from a Consideration of the Nature of God, and his Attributes of Wisdom and Mercy; for 'tis scarce conceivable that God whose Goodness is Commensurate to the whole Creation, and like the Prophet on the *Shunamites* Child stretch'd over all the Issues of his Power and Mercy cou'd ever intend to confine the Knowledge of *himself* to the Jews only, and leave so large, so fair a Portion of the World, to the Dominion, and Sway of the Devil. But that He design'd in the Fullness of Time to break down the Partition-wall, that the Blessings of Abraham might descend upon the Gentiles, and the Riches of his Goodness freely flow to all the Nations round about. That he intended no longer to cull from the Loins of Adam a Tribe of Heirs, that shou'd alone inherit the whole Treasure of his Mercy; but that he wou'd at length admit the outcast desolate Gentiles, (who all this time were the Refuse and Off-scouring of his Favour) to a common Participation of it with themselves.

This was foretold by Moses and the Prophets; but their Ignorance in the Doctrines of their own Law, was a main Reason, why they were so difficult in receiving those of the Gospel.

Tho' (as I have said) our Lord had a great Tenderness for the House of *Israel*, and had

sent his Apostle St. *Peter* (whose Province was the whole Nation of the *Jews*) to represent unto 'em, the design of his Coming in the Flesh, and to lay before 'em the Gospel Covenant, and all the Terms, on which they might expect Salvation: yet that he cou'd not so confine his Mercys to them, as to exclude for ever the rest of Mankind, from the Benefits of his meretorious Life and Death. And therefore dispatch'd the Apostles of the *Gentiles*, to enlarge his Fold, and make his Church truly Catholick as well for its extent, as Doctrine: a Church that nothing shou'd bound but the extremities of Nature, that shou'd reach as far, and wide as Gods Providence on Earth; according to the Voice of Scripture, *that God would give his Son, the Heathen for his Inheritance; and the uttermost Parts of the Earth for his Possession*: St. *Paul* willing to accomplish this Prediction, is in Labours abundant, every where pulling down the Fabrick of *Pagan* Worship, and adviseing his Gentile Hearers to change their faulty Religion, for a better; to forsake their Idols, and direct their Devotions to the living (that is to the Christian) God, who is able both to hear and to relieve. Which leads me to my next Proposition,

Secondly, to consider what Methods and Ways of Argumentation, the Apostles us'd to gain a Conquest over the Understandings of their Hearers, and to enduce 'em to believe and submit to the Doctrines they taught; and those were,

*First,*

*First*, By a right Interpretation of Prophecies: and

*Secondly*, By a Power of working Miracles.

But before we proceed farther, we may premise, that there are some Evangelical Doctrines, and Precepts, which are of their own Nature intrinsically good; and others that derive their Truth and Goodness from the Authority of the Revealer.

The First sort are admitted, as soon as propos'd, because they bring with 'em their own Evidence to the Understanding, which at first view judges 'em agreeable to Nature's Sentiments, and the dictates of right Reason; so that none with any Colour of Pretence can reject such, excepting those only, that are given unto a reprobate Sense; *or those, whose Principles and Judgments are debauch'd by base Interests, or corrupted by secular Regards.* Such Precepts were as to their Substance, contain'd in the Scriptures of the *Jews*, tho' not with that perspicuity and Light as they are in the Christian's. An Evidence of which we have in the noble Sermon of our Lord on the Mount, in which he extended the Obligation of those precepts, and made 'em reach the Intention of the Soul, and *all the private Scenes of Action there*, known only to God, and their own Consciences.

But besides these, there are other Doctrines, whose Truth depend solely upon the Authority of the Revealer, as that Jesus Christ was the *Messiah*, and all the Consequences of that. In this Case the Apostles to gain Credit to their



their Doctrine, and to convince the Enemies of its Truth, were fain to make use of those two Topicks of Demonstration, *viz.*

*First*, Prophecies in the Old Testament, which were an acknowledg'd principle among the *Jews*; and

*Secondly*, Miracles whose surprizing Commanding Pow'r, is a Proof and Evidence to all Mankind.

And that they shou'd be infallibly knowing to enterpret aright the Prophecies; and be endu'd with Power from above to work Miracles upon Occasion, was but highly Necessary for them, who pretend to have a Commission from God, to overthrow Gods own Institntion, and plant another Form of Worship in its Room.

First, then of Prophecies that relate to our Saviour; who is the alone Reason and Foundation of the Gospel; whom the Evangelists and Apostles preach'd up as the *Messiah* long ago foretold. And here by the Way we may observe the great Advantages (had they made good Use of 'em) the latter *Jews* had above their predecessors, who saw that *by a meridian Light* which the good old Patriarks saw but obscurely under the Shadows of Types, and Predictions.

Prophecy and Completion yielded a delightful prospect; they mutually advanc'd each others Strength and Beauty, as *a direct and a reflex ray give a double Heat and Lustre*. The Eye with greater pleasure runs from the Event to the Prediction, than from the Prediction to the Event. From Prophecies the Eye looks at  
the



the Object, thro' a thick and doubtful Medium, but backward tis guided all along by a Trace of Light, and Faith is swallow'd up in Vision. But to return, the Apostles to obviate all the Cavils of the *Jews*, shew'd clearly, that our Jesus was the very Christ; was that *Messiah*, so early promis'd, and so long expected, and was now usher'd into the world with all the Solemnities of Types and Prophecies; all which he compleatly answer'd in the several Stages of his Life, Death, and Resurrection; and thereby declar'd by a nice Correspondence to them, that he was that Shilo, that very Substance, at which all those Obscurations pointed. It wou'd be tedious as well as needless to give a particular detail of 'em, and therefore I shall content my self briefly to mention two or three; God said to *Moses*, a Prophet will I raise like unto thee: and St. *Peter* informs us, that that Prophet, was Jesus Christ. If we enquire after his Family, he is declar'd to be the Root and Offspring of *David*, and the bright morning Star, and the People at the first sight of him shouted, founding *Hosannah* to the Son of *David*. In short he fulfill'd the Character of the *Messiah*, in doing and suffering all that was foretold the *Messiah*, shou'd do or suffer. *Zechariah* said they weigh'd for my Price thirty Peices of Silver. St. *Matt.* will inform us that *Judas* fulfill'd that Prediction by selling Jesus to the chief Priest for the same Number of Silver Peices. If *Isaiah* foretold, he was number'd among transgressors; St. *Matthew* explains, that Prophecy,

by

by minding us of our Lords Crucifixion between two Thieves. I hope I need not alledge any more out of that plenty that might be added, since 'tis plain by these, that the Evangelical Writers confuted the *Jews* out of their own Scriptures, by shewing, they were all fulfill'd by Jesus Christ, and by Him only.

And so I proceed Secondly to shew the second Method the Apostles us'd for the Ratification of their Doctrines, and Confutation of their Adversaries, and that was by working Miracles.

This gave themselves, and their Doctrines full Credit and Reputation. For a Miracle is the highest Testimonial that God can give Man. 'Tis Gods own Seal by which he confirms the Mission and Instructions of his Embassadors *and justifies our reception of both*. And frees our Minds from all sorts of Doubting, when we see God owning and approving both by his Almighty Pow'r. We may define a Miracle to be that which exceeds the Agency of second Causes to produce, and what exceeds the Pow'r of all created Nature to effect; must have for its Author, the God of Nature. But if any shou'd object, that this Notion of a Miracle, wou'd do our Cause but little Service, and tell us, that we are ignorant of the extent of Natures Power, and consequently cannot know, when such is wrought because that may be done by Nature, which we think is done by the God of Nature: we may reply to it, that although we are ignorant of the extent

tent of Natures Pow'r and are not able to assign the just Bounds of it; though we cannot know the utmost it can do, yet we know what it cannot do and clearly perceive, when an effect Surmounts All the Strength and Vertue of second Causes; there may be in Nature Causes sufficient to stop the Sun in its Course; but we may be sure, the Voice of Man cannot be reckon'd into the Number of them: and therefore we may conclude that to be a true Miracle, and wrought by the Pow'r of God, when we see there is no Proportion betwixt the Effect, and the appearing visible Cause of it; by such like miraculous Operations the Apostles vanquish'd their Adversaries, and establish'd their Lord's Religion: for that must of Necessity be authentick and Binding, that is so solemnly touch'd by the Sceptre of Gods Power; unless we can Imagine that infinite Goodness cou'd conspire, with the wicked to deceive, and lend the broad Seal of Heav'n to confirm an Imposture.

The Arguments then the Apostles us'd to convince the *Jew* and *Gentile* of the Trnth of those Doctrines contain'd now in our Scripture, were the Miracles wrought in Confirmation of 'em; and to us at this distance of Time the Scripture *by a reciprocal Justice* confirms the reality, and the being of those Miracles, and thereby Works the same Conviction in our Minds as the Miracles themselves did in the Minds of the Spectators of 'em.

Now after these powerful Arguments of Con-  
C
viction,

viſtion, a croud of others, fall in, drawn from  
 the Nature and Matter of the Revelation, in  
 which is contain'd a clearer Diſcovery of God,  
 and his Providence; of the Immortality of the  
 Soul, and the Certainty of Rewards in another  
 World; all Subjects of the greateſt Moment,  
 and cou'd not chooſe but command Attention,  
 and impreſs laſting Characters of Conviction  
 upon the Underſtanding and Conſcience of  
 the Hearer. Theſe were the Subjects of which  
 the Gentile Philoſophers had but ſhort and im-  
 perfect Notice; tho' it cannot be denyed, but  
 ſome of the learn'd and virtuous among 'em,  
*ſuch as Socrates, Plato and Tully*; by a cloſe Ap-  
 plication of their Minds to ſtudy, and a fre-  
 quent Exerciſe of their Reaſon, have had freſh  
 Springs of Thought, that mounted 'em as high  
 as ever Inſpiration cou'd: but when the plea-  
 ſing Heat, began to cool, when the entertain-  
 ing Rapture languish'd and went off, they wou'd  
 freely own like inferiour Mortals, the uncer-  
 tainty of theſe Speculations, which (during the  
 Heat of Fancy) warm'd their Breasts into ſuch  
 Tranſports of Delight. All their Schemes of  
 Happineſs were but gueſs and conjecture; a  
 Foundation too weak to bottom an Aſſurance  
 on. A certain Knowledge of theſe Things is  
 brought to light by Revelation; which only  
 cou'd relieve the importunate Searches and  
 Craveings of the Soul in Matters of this Impor-  
 tance, and Force it from all farther Perplexi-  
 ties and Doubts. Theſe were the noble and  
 conyincing Doctrines, that promoted the  
 Spread-



Spreading of the Gospel: that *carry'd its sound into all the Earth, and its Words to the Ends of the World.*

These made the Progress of its Triumph sure over all the Pow'r of Superstition and Idolatry, when guarded by the Prescriptions of Ages, and abetted by secular Authority: it then lifted up its Head and subdued the Nations; and the Company of Believers according to the promise made to *Abraham* were as *the Stars of Heav'n innumerable; they fled like a Cloud, and as Doves to the Windows of Gods House.* And besides, *those seal'd of the Tribes, of Israel, Multitudes of all Nations, and Kindreds, and People, and the Word grew mightily and prevail'd, and the Children of the Desolate were more than of the marry'd Wife;* and all this without Force, or Violence; its Victories then were innocent and calm, yet sure and spreading, as the Triumphs of Light over Darkness; nothing cou'd stop or hinder its increase, it thriv'd by Oppression, and prevail'd against their Arts, and their Arm<sup>y</sup>, their Philosophy, and Interest and vitious Inclinations; it flourish'd under the Frowns of Emperours and their provincial Deputies: so that the Cross of this dispir'd and crucified Jesus is now become the Pride and Glory of their Crown and Scepters. That Christianity shou'd Subsist under so much Tyranny, and at length make foolish the Wisdom and Policy of the World, what cou'd it be less than the Pow'r of God and Wisdom of God? The Course of its Victories were



certainly owing like *Joshua's* to Gods more immediate Interposition, and miraculous Direction.

But if in the next Place we consider what vast Advantages it had in it self, *over the best and sublimest human Systems and Hypotheses*, we shall be the less surpriz'd to find how universally it establish'd it self, and how securely it holds out an endless Seige against all attacks of Infidelity, Apostacy, and Vice; shaking the Head at them in a chearful Scorn, like the Daughter of *Jerusalem* at the Armies of *Sennacherib*.

The Morality of the Heathens had, in truth, no other Object but themselves; it terminated in human Nature, and not a little of it, in the meanest Part of that Nature; it pretended to search no further, nor aspire beyond such an Happiness and Perfection, as a man might furnish out of himself: and some Professors found it more agreeable to their Inclinations to stop a great Way even of that. One Sect of these enquirers extended, all the Rules, and Aims of their Philosophy no further than to the attainment of the State and Practice of maim'd and imperfect Vertue, which is the utmost, our unassisted Faculties remain capable of arriving at since the Fall. And this poor Extent of Happiness by no means comensurate either to the Desire or End of our Being. They valued and admitted as *an ample Compensation* and Reward for all the Miseries and Misfortunes, that cou'd befall them in the course of human Affairs,

fairs, and for all the painful Exercises of those Duties, in which they pretended their chief and only Happiness consisted; at the same time they cou'd not conceal the great Difficulty, uneasiness, and Inconveniency of these Restraints and Regulations; and found it as Necessary as other men, to fortifie one anothers Minds against all such Discouragements. These were the Men, that wou'd be biting their Lips, while they were bragging of their Circumstances; and discover'd a more exquisite Sense of each, by stifling, than they cou'd have done, by venting their Complaints. This was such an Absurdity, as cou'd not escape the notice of other Philosophers; and some of these to mend the matter annext the Goods of Fortune to the former Scheme, and look'd upon Vertue and these together, as so large and compleat a fund of Happiness, that there cou'd be no occasion to seek it further.

Others not relishing such melancholy Speculations and Entertainments, were very easily dispos'd to place the Sum of their Happiness, and center of their Philosophy in sensual Delicacies and Gratifications. And what now was the Occasion of this Mistake and Confusion? But they all miss'd of the true Object of Duty and Happiness, God Himself, whose Honour and Glory had they made the End, and Purpose of all their Actions, employ'd all their Pow'rs in Imitating his Perfections, and look'd no where for their chief Happiness, but in Him, and from Him: they had then in a great Measure

Measure, *anticipated* the Gospel Morality of which *this is one of the first and fundamental Principles.*

I shall only add upon this Head, that as the Heathen Systems of Morality, for want of a right object, were *sophisticated* with several erroneous Doctrines and Precepts, as particularly those of the Lawfulness and Laudableness of Revenge, Self-murder, an ostentatious Glory, and the like; so the *best* of 'em were recommended only as the dictates of human Wisdom; and not as the express and positive Commands of God; consider'd (I say) in respect of their Authors, they were Admonitions not Laws.

And Lastly, the good Consequences of conforming to the Rule, and the bad Consequences of rejecting it, bear no more proportion to one another in the Comparison between the Christian and Heathen Morality, than on obscure and conjectural Foresight of Rewards and Punishments, and their Duration, does to the Certainty of a State of Joys ineffable, and Torments intolerable; and both eternal.

Now since God has been pleas'd to give us in the bright Mirror of His Word, some mysterious Truths to exercise our Understandings, as well as moral Rules and Precepts to Exercise our Will and Passion;

I shall in the last Place enquire by what Ways we may arrive at the Knowledge of 'em: and to this purpose some men advance faith to the Depression of Reason; and some extol Reason to the Extinction of Faith; and both  
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are in the wrong; because each ought to have its proper Share of Causality in the Production of this effect, *viz.* an Assent in the Understanding. The Advocates for Faith general plead after the manner: as we are to give up the obedience of our Wills to the Precepts, so of our Understandings to the Doctrines of the Gospel, when we know God to be revealer of 'em; this is a confess'd Principle among Christians that all Scripture was giv'n by Inspiration; this is the Foundation of divine Truth, and the Demonstration of Evangelical Doctrines; so that what ever appears to be contain'd therein, justly challenges the Assent of Faith, tho' we cannot clear off fully, all the Difficulties with which a Doctrine may be attended. However Reason otherwise may be discerning; in things of this Nature, 'tis confin'd and cannot see; and therefore ought to be kept within its proper Limits.

*Gods Wisdom hath no greater Enemy, than mans unsanctified; none with greater Difficulty soften'd into a Compliance with and Submission to the profounder Truths of Revelation, than they, who too forwardly adhere to their private Reason. Who were wiser in their Times than the Philosophers of Athens? Yet these were the Men that call'd St. Paul Babbler, when he preach'd up the Mystery of the Resurrection. Reason then is too short a Line, to measure Divine Truths by: and this the Apostle intimates in his Triumph o'er the Wise, the Scribe, and the Disputer: if Reason is so often non-pluss'd, and*  
baff'd



baff'd in the common Occurrences and visible Effects of Nature, it must much more be so, in things remov'd from Sense, and Supernatural. And if their not being understood, be not cause sufficient for Reason to reject 'em, because they have for their Evidence, the Testimony of the Senses; so neither is it Cause sufficient for Reason to reject things Supernatural and Mysterious, because they have for their Evidence the Veracity of God testifying these things in the Scripture. Revelations that are above its Comprehension, Reason ought with Silence to adore, not too curiously pry into. These depths of Religion, are Objects of Faith and Tryals of Obedience, and ought no more to be disputed, than Principles; than first and common Notions. For Reason, after its best Enquires, if it handles 'em not with Submission to the Revelation, will be found not so much to defend as oppose 'em, betray the Truth by crude Explications, and gain 'em more Enemies than Friends and *Profelytes*. Further yet, they generally insinuate, that Reason most improv'd can give but a slender Account of the prime Articles of our Faith; of Three personal Subsistences in one Essence; of the Eternal Generation of the Son; the Procession of the Holy Ghost from Father and Son; of the Incarnation of our Blessed Lord and Saviour. In these and the like Instances of Difficulty, they wou'd have Reason veil to Faith, and submit to its Prerogative. Why were the *Jews scandaliz'd* at the Gospel, but  
because



because by all their Reason, they cou'd not behold Life and Glory in such an ignominious Death as Christs was? and the Preaching of Christ crucified was Foolishness to the Greeks; because their Philosophy concluded it impossible, that Life shou'd cou'd be sought out off Death, and Salvation sought for in a Curse, and Malediction. 'Tis Faith in the Revelation that can make us apprehend the Redemption of the World; the Justification of a Sinner by the imputed Righteousness of another; the Recovery of Life by anothers Death; and Healing by another Stripes. All other Imaginations and Reasonings in these Instances, are but Weapons of Lust; wherewith we resist the Wisdom of God, and therefore to be laid aside and captivated to the Reports that are made in the Scriptures, altho' they do not transmit any immediate Ideas or Irradiations of their own upon the Soul. And this is in the Language of *St. Paul* to become Fools that we may be Wise. Here we must be content to see the Mysteries of *Jesus*, and our Redemption, as the *Israelites* light, and the Presence of God in the Wilderness; the one was in the Cloud, and the other in the Ark; and that too was under several Curtains and Coverings.

These mysterious Truths are propos'd as objects of Faith not Science; and therefore to be receiv'd with due Submission, not be put to the Question, and scrupulously to be treated with the Torture of an Inquisition. If after an Enquiry, we understand the Import of the

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Words,

Words, which in such a Connection and Dependence on each other, offer but one plain, determinate Sense, tho' we can't comprehend the Thing signified by them, we may safely give place to Faith and assent in gross, or universally to what is unknown, so far as 'tis carry'd under the Notion of divine Revelation. If we thus yield the Obedience of our Faith, we shall quickly *defeat the little Sallies of Reason, against those Doctrines that have been made venerable by the Approbation of the Church of God in all Ages.* On the other side, the Advocates for Reason, will not suffer it to be laid aside, for any plausible Harangue, that may be made against it, but allow it to umpire and determine in Controversies of Religion. 'Tis the great Privilege of our Nature, That which distinguishes us, not only from the animal World, but from one another: by this we rival Angels in their noblest Perfection: *for their Intuition is but a Sort of Reason that makes a speedier Flight thro' all the Propositions of Syllogism, and arrives sooner at the Conclusion, than human Reason can. For Intuition strickly taken, is an attribute too great for created Beings, and can only properly belong to God, who sees all Things their Causes and Effects, at one omniscient View.*

But to proceed; This Faculty is a divine Light kindled in the Soul by God himself, to guide us in the Search of Nature and Philosophy, and all our Enquires both human and divine; whosoever therefore flights its Directions, despises the most glorious Part of Gods  
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Creation; endeavours to extinguish Knowledge; to confound the Distinctions of Vice, and Virtue; of Truth and Falsehood. For it is by this alone we pass our Judgement upon Things or Notions, and settle the respective Characters of either. All this is true, and the Sphere of its Activity is as large as some would have it in things purely natural and moral; but in divine Things 'tis so far only right as it acts under the Directions and Restraints of Revelation; as long as it acts in Conformity to the Rules of that, it can never interpret Scripture to the Detriment of any Truth, at least fundamental therein contain'd; because it then submits (tho' Difficulties do arise, that lye cross to its Apprehension) when 'tis assur'd of the Sense and Authority of the Revelation.

Indeed when Reason has run its utmost length, it then delivers *the Torch to Faith, to guide us on in the gloomy Passage of the remaining Way*. For to Reason, after its largest Travels o're mysterious Subjects, there will still remain a *Terra incognita* beyond, a vast Tract for the Husbandry of Faith to cultivate and improve. For this vigorous Grace, never stands at gaze, or sits down as 'twere on this side *Jordan*, but passes on, pursues the Instructions of Reason, and entertains the Mind with fresh views, *always advancing under the Shelter of Reasons antecedent Demonstrations*.

'Tis Reason that assures Faith of the Existence of these Objects; and 'tis Faith, that accompanies the Speculation, and releives the

Understanding with some faint *Ideas*, and imperfect Notices, of the Modes, and Properties of 'em, which may well serve us in this State of Mortality and Probation, till clearer Light gives better Discoveries, *and it self is swallow'd up in Vision*. In such sort of Objects there is something within our reach, which with ease we apprehend, and this within Reason's province. There are other Parts of the Object, *quæ superant fastigium & ambitum Ingenii*; to big for the Dimensions of the most capacious Understanding; and these belong particularly to Faith. There is a bright and a dark side in every such Object, which *like the Pillar of Fire and Cloud will go before, and surely guide us to the heavenly Canaan*.

Reason First opens the Field of Contemplation, and carries its Enquires thro' all the Tracts of Revelation and there stops at the the Bounds God has prescrib'd; and leaves the other Part of the Object to be discern'd by the Workings and Sagacity of Faith.

In general, Reason assures us by a just Interpretation of Scripture, that *great Things are laid up in Store for them that love God; such as Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither hath it ever enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive*. Of all which, neither Sense or Reason give any distinct *Ideas*; because God has made no distinct Discoveries of 'em. But notwithstanding they are in Part conceal'd, yet we have general Notions, tho' no immediate *Ideas* of what He has promis'd, and are even  
now



now sure, that they who are prepar'd, and qualified for 'em, shall in due time be made Partakers of 'em. And this is the sole Effect of a sprightly and victorious Faith. And therefore we give an unshaken Assent to those promises; because Reason tells us, they are bottom'd on the Goodness, Justice, and Veracity of God, *who cannot deceive or be deceived.* Therefore Reason and Faith ought never to be separated, but to be allow'd their joynt Office and Ministry, *in the Conduct of our Speculations, in the great Concerns of Religion and Mysteries of the Gospel.* For they reflect Light on each other, and mutually supply each others Defects.

Reason First points out the Object of Belief, and Faith refines upon the Notice, and improves it; they reciprocally help one another, and as Faith justifies our Reason, so on the other side Reason justifies our Faith. But neither alone, or in Conjunction, is here able to comprehend all the Dimensions of its Object. And if the want of a full Comprehension can warrant the Disbelief of it, they may then advance one step further, and proclaim their Atheism; and *let the World know, that they neither do nor ought to believe the Being of a God;* because His Nature is most certainly incomprehensible to a finite Understanding; and therefore this Consideration shou'd be a Check to the proud Assurance of some Men boasting of their Reason, and be a solid Argument for Humility and Resignation; for Reason after its boldest Labours must acquiesce in a *ne plus ultra,*

*ultra*; and content it self with this Knowledge, that a further Knowledge cannot be obtain'd.

All the Advantages of human Learning; the Stores of Arts and Sciences, cannot help it to go beyond the fixt Bounds of Revelation. We may justly say to the magnified Reason, some Men plead for, as 'tis said to the Sea; *hitherto shall thy proud Waves come, and no further.*

I shall end this Disquisition and Discourse with a Quotation from a wise and learn'd Man; when *Celsus* persuaded the Heathens to follow the Conduct of their Reason, in the receiving any Doctrine, and told 'em that all Error was brought into the World by Faith; *Origen* oppos'd nothing but the Evidences of Prophecies, and the Word of God as the Rule of Faith. Which if it be not simply believ'd without any philosophical Enquiry, concerning the Matters affirm'd in it; many of Necessity will still wallow in Infidelity, after all that God hath done for the rescuing 'em out of it; and only a few find That by rational Search, which before they believ'd by simple Faith. Let *Celsus* then rally the Christians with his *πρωτον μόνον*; let the Gospel be to the Greeks *μωρία*; let *Julian* despise it; let *Photinus* use it with scorn; let 'em object to us our Faith, as the height of our Wisdom; the Ground and Substance of our Hope; let the Apostate jest at it, and the Infidel disparage it, as irrational and absurd: yet we may satisfie our selves with the unerring Determination of the Apostle: if our Gospel is Foolishness 'tis the Foolishness of God, and the

the Foolishness of God is Wiser than the Wisdom of Men.

Now to this Good and All-wise God be ascrib'd as it is most Due, all Praise, Might, Majesty, Glory, and Dominion both now, and for evermore. *Amen.*

*F I N I S.*

